

## THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM IN WESTERN IBERIA: RESILIENT SIGNS OF A SYMBOLIC REVOLUTION?

### *AS ORIGENS DO MEGALITISMO, NO OCIDENTE PENINSULAR: SINAIS RESILIENTES DE UMA REVOLUÇÃO SIMBÓLICA?*

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#### ABSTRACT

The long-term debate on the rise of Megalithism have been mainly concern with chronological and geographic issues. In archaeological literature, when and where were major questions relying the causes for such a complex symbolic phenomenon as a secondary item. After Oriental missionaries and Segmentary societies explanations fall out Environmental changes have recently been pointed out as a trigger for Megalithism. This vast array of explanations reflect how difficulty is to identify the historical reasons laying beyond such a wide phenomenon were global and local features are combine in a multitude of ways. Creation, mimic, transfers and adaptations are social mechanisms that underlie Megalithism and for each one of this scenarios different reasons could be invoke to explain its origins. In this text, the origins of Megalithism in western Iberia – particularly in southern Portugal – will be discuss testing the traditional materialist perspectives – either Marxist or Processual that considered innovative ideological manifestations as the output of changes in a particular economic infrastructure or subsystem – against Middle Neolithic data. Under those traditional paradigms signs of economic variations that can explain the emergence of Megalithism as significant changes in faunal/botanic assemblages and settlement patterns were search for.

Considering the archaeographic absence for an economic turnover the origins of Megalithism seems – in Western Iberia - the result of a symbolic revolution entailed by Middle Neolithic groups and for the moment devoid of a visible economic ingredient. In southern Portugal, the origins of Megalithism – dated c. 3600 BC – are not connected neither to the Neolithisation process – c. two millennia earlier – neither to the Secondary Products Revolution – c. 300/400 hundred years after. By the middle of the 4th millennium BC in a scenario of an apparent economic continuity

this symbolic disruption described as Megalithism will emerge. The origins of this innovative symbolic landscapes will be here discuss.

KEY WORDS: Megalithism; Origins; Western Iberia; Middle Neolithic, Symbolic revolution

## RESUMO

*Na literatura arqueológica, o longo debate sobre as origens dos monumentos megalíticos tem focado principalmente as questões cronológicas e geográficas. Quando e onde surgem estas arquitecturas são os tópicos dominantes e as causas profundas de um fenómeno simbólico tão complexo parecem secundárias sobretudo depois do abandono de quadros explicativos como os que assentavam na entrada de missionários orientais, no espaço europeu, ou na evolução autóctone e universal das sociedades segmentárias. Recentemente, as mudanças ambientais foram apontadas como um catalizador do Megalitismo, demonstrando a complexidade efectiva de um fenómeno que combina, em simultâneo, elementos trans-regionais e regionais, em distintas versões. Criação, mimetização, transferência e adaptação são diferentes mecanismos sociais que subjazem aos Megalitismos e que possuem distintas causalidades históricas.*

*Neste texto, as origens do Megalitismo, no Ocidente peninsular - particularmente no Sul de Portugal - serão discutidas confrontando as perspectivas materialistas tradicionais (marxistas ou processuais) que consideram as rupturas simbólicas como causa última da alteração da infra-estrutura ou do subsistema económico, com o registo arqueológico do Neolítico médio. Vão ser, por isso, procurados elementos do registo como dados faunísticos, botânicos e padrões de povoamento que possam reflectir alterações económicas que – de acordo com os paradigmas materialistas - podem explicar as origens deste fenómeno. No Neolítico médio, a mais significativa ruptura que se detecta no registo arqueográfico é o aparecimento de estruturas megalíticas que, nesta região particular, materializa uma revolução simbólica que, neste momento, parece desprovida de componente económica visível.*

*No sul de Portugal, as origens do Megalitismo – datadas de cerca de 3600 AC - não estão conectadas com o processo de Neolitização – que as antecede em dois milénios - nem estão relacionadas com a Revolução dos Produtos Secundários que virá a acontecer c. 300/400 anos mais tarde. Por isso, em meados do 4º milénio AC, num cenário de aparente continuidade económica, esta imensa mudança descrita como Megalitismo pode ser designada como uma revolução simbólica cujas origens devem ser discutidas.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Megalitismo; Origens; Ocidente peninsular; Neolítico Médio, Revolução simbólica*

## THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – MAKING A LONG STORY SHORT

“Origins” is a theme that ranks among the most discussed and passionate topics in historical sciences. The origins of Megalithism in Prehistoric Europe have been one of the Big Issues addressed by archaeologists since the 19th century. An almost endless list of references about the Iberian Peninsula, could be gathered, describing the peninsula alone as one of Megalithic Europe’s core areas (e.g. Daniel, 1963, p. 72; Savory, 1971, p. 87).

Like other phenomena regarding Prehistoric Europe, in the first half of the 20th century debates on Megalithism were strongly influenced by geohistorical determinism and by the *Ex Oriente Lux* paradigm.

After a long historiographic period during which Megalithic origins were considered the most important (and sometimes the only) issue deserving attention, the Radiocarbon Revolution (as C. Renfrew put it, in 1973) changed the *status quo* of the interpretation according to which Megalithism was an endogenous invention of Western Europe.

Since then, the issue of the “Origins” became less important in archaeological literature. Sometimes it was even absent from it; the focus turned to other economic and territorial topics instead. From then on, Megalithism was seen mainly in the light of strategies developed by competing agropastoral societies to organize Neolithic territories and 14C dating was expected to solve the chronological issues related with Megalithism. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, archaeologists from different regions of Megalithic Europe used the most abundant archaeological organic material – charcoal – to date megalithic monuments. Charcoal samples collected in different locations within the monuments – from paleo-soils from before the monumental building, pits dug for setting the monoliths, funerary chambers, corridors, and even tumulus – were used to establish a (non-critical) 14C chronology for Megalithism in Atlantic and Mediterranean Europe.

Brittany was then considered the pioneering area and Southern Portugal – though not yet dated by 14C method – was also considered one of the first megalithic regions in Europe, with a supposed chronology ranging from 5000-4500 cal BCE (Muller, 1998 in Paulsson, 2017, p.6), in view of local architectures and grave goods.

New megalithic 14C time ranges recently established, based mainly on human bones, using the AMS technique combined with Bayesian analysis, triggered a revision of these previously accepted chronologies.

Following these methodological innovations, which determined the Third

Radiocarbon Revolution (Taylor, 1996; Bayliss, 2009), Southern Portugal lost its role as a focus of megalithic architectures. In view of the newly available radiometric dates, the origins of Megalithism in Southern Portugal are not older than 3600-3400 BCE (Boaventura, 2009; Rocha, 2005; Mataloto et al., 2017) – almost one thousand years later than expected. In other regions where Megalithism had been considered a very early phenomenon, 14C dates established by means of human bones point at the first half of the 5th millennium – e.g. Brittany, at Les Chirons/Bougons (Paulsson 2017, p.71). Such early chronology could not be confirmed in other territories traditionally classified also as pioneers. In the Cantabria region, 14C dates based only on human bones, with a standard deviation of less than 100 years, also point at the second quarter of the 4th millennium BCE – e.g. at Larrarte/Gipuzkoa (Mujika and Edeso, 2011). In view of this reappraised chronology, the issue of the Origins can also be readdressed using this new data to discuss different scenarios potentially related to Megalithism in southern Portugal.

Considering the multiple aspects of Megalithism, we should stress that only funerary Megalithism involving acts of building/digging an architectural feature for the dead will be discussed here. Burials in natural caves that also evidence a “megalithic phase,” already pointed out by V. Gonçalves (1978), none the less represent a previous and earlier tradition that existed since the Early Neolithic and was in use until the final Chalcolithic.

## **THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – NEW TYPES OF EXPLANATIONS**

Following a long period of Orientalist influence, discarded by the 14C Revolution, after the 1970s the origins of Megalithism were debated under two major theoretical paradigms defended by Processual and Historical Materialist archaeology.

Reflecting a, perhaps not random, coincidence – due to the seminal role played by Lewis Morgan, as a common ancestor of Processual and Marxist archaeology – both schools considered Economy to be the major subsystem/infrastructure in History. Symbolic subsystem or ideological superstructure are understood as by-products of the material dimensions of life. As subsidiary elements – not driving forces of human dynamics – ideological and symbolic aspects should reflect the way in which economic forces act in a given environmental context. Ideological and symbolic aspects should legitimise, strengthen and pacify social relations that emerge from an economic *status quo*.

Changes affecting the economic subsystem or infrastructure, caused either by environmental change, demographic growth or class conflicts – just to mention the most popular variables evoked by Processual and Marxist archaeology, should be reflected in changes of the ideological and symbolic apparatus of any society. According to some authors, historical movements are expected to end, not to begin, in those peripheral almost useless symbolic domains – for some, *hyper materialistic* perspectives. According to this theoretical background, societies, at some point of their development, predictably start to build huge buildings for the dead to shape social topography. Considering Megalithic monuments as an almost imperative phase of social development, it was accepted that they could have emerged from multiple foci, as different Neolithic groups in different geographies could have simultaneously reached the same maturity level, according to Renfrew (1976).

Studies on Megalithism began to develop a more regionalist approach (e.g. in Portugal Jorge 1982; Gonçalves 1992; Senna-Martinez, 1989), and prehistoric societies were considered in their territorial background, in which social systems and social tensions predictably were the major historical forces – with minimum external contributions (or even none).

Megalithism was mostly described as a territorial issue, virtually emptied of its funerary and symbolic dimensions. In many cases, social investment in monument building was considered a transgenerational program that could be explained by the frontier role played by Megaliths in the landscape defined by segmentary societies (e.g. Renfrew; Chapman 1981, 1991).

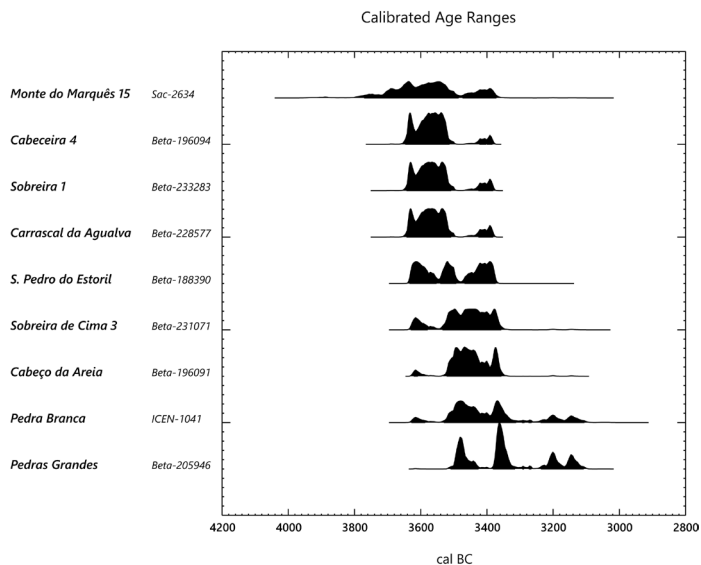
In line with such perspectives, and therefore considering Megalithism mainly a multi-foci indigenous creation, thus rendering chronology indeed a secondary matter, the economic subsystems of Middle Neolithic groups must present clear signs of maturation that should be detected in the archaeological record.

## **THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – ECONOMIC DATA ON A NEW PHASE**

In view of the radiometric sequence available for southern Portugal, the emergence of Megalithism seems well defined. Around 3600 BCE (Fig.1), Neolithic groups resorted to a new set of practices involving dead bodies and, for the first time, they massive used stone to build/dig monuments for the dead (Table 1 and Fig.1). In line with materialistic perspectives, such moment of disruption – a label to be discussed later – should have been entailed by a disruptive change in the economic and social organization. We shall briefly consider data on the economy and settlement of the Late Middle Neolithic to analyse such change.

**Table 1. Chronology for Megalithism Origins in Souther Portugal  
(using only human bones as samples)**

	Lab. number	Sample	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ‰	BP	2 $\sigma$ cal BC	References
Dolmens						
Carrascal da Agualva	Beta-228577	<i>Homo</i>	-19,03	4770 $\pm$ 40	3643-3381	Boaventura, 2009
Pedras Grandes	Beta-205946	<i>Homo</i>	-19,57	4590 $\pm$ 40	3510-3108	Boaventura, 2009
Pedra Branca	ICEN-1041	<i>Homo</i>	-19,70	4620 $\pm$ 60	3630-3100	Soares, 2010
Sobreira 1	Beta-233283	<i>Homo</i>	-	4770 $\pm$ 40	3643-3381	Boaventura et al., 2013
Cabeceira 4	Beta-196094 Wk- 41089	<i>Homo</i>	-19,42	4780 $\pm$ 40	3647-3383	Carvalho & Rocha 2017
Cabeço da Areia	Beta-196091	<i>Homo</i>	-	4650 $\pm$ 40	3621-3356	Rocha & Duarte, 2009
Hipogea						
S. Pedro do Estoril	Beta-188390	<i>Homo</i>	-19,00	4720 $\pm$ 40	3634-3374	Gonçalves, 2009
Sobreira de Cima 3	Beta-23107	<i>Homo</i>	-	4670 $\pm$ 50	3630-3357	Valera, 2013
Monte do Marquês 15	Sac-2634	<i>Homo</i>	-	4810 $\pm$ 90	3771-3371	Baptista et al., 2013



*Fig.1- Graphical representation of the calibration of 14 C results for human bones from southern Portugal earliest dolmens and hipogea (using Reiner et al., 2013 calibration curve).*

**Table 2. Early and Middle Neolithic Faunal Remains in Southern Portugal\***

	Wild Species			Domesticated Species		
	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	<i>Bos primigenius</i>	<i>Bos taurus</i>	<i>Ovis aries/ Capra hircus</i>	<i>Sus domesticus</i>
Early Neolithic	+++	++	?	++	+++	?
Middle Neolithic	++	+++	-	+	+++	?

\*Despite a quantitative dimension introduced by the number of +, Southern Portugal faunal assemblages are very poor, due to taphonomic reasons, and thus do not allow a statistical analysis of the data. \*Adapted from Valente & Carvalho 2014, Table 1

**Table. 3 Early and Middle Neolithic Domesticated Plant Remains /Pollens in Southern Portugal\***

	<i>Cerealia</i> (pollen)	<i>Triticum</i>	<i>Hordueum</i>	<i>Vicia</i>	References
Early Neolithic					
Lapiáz das Lameiras	-	x	x	x	López-Doriga & Simões, 2015
São Pedro de Canaferrim	-	x	x	x	López-Doriga & Simões, 2015
Rio Sizandro	x	-	-	-	Dambeck et al 2015
Middle Neolithic					
Algarão da Goldrax	x	-	-	-	Straus et al, 1992

\*In Southern Portugal the extreme scarcity of botanical remains is due to taphonomic reasons, but also to the still unusual use of the paleo-botanic protocol to retrieve botanical remains.

**Table 4. Early and Middle Neolithic Settlement patterns in Southern Portugal**

		Early Neolithic	Middle Neolithic
Geology	Coastal sands	x	x
	Limestone massifs	x	x
	Granit and other metamorphic rocks	x	x
Topography	Coastal	x	x
	Lowlands	x	x
	Medium-high hilltops (c. 400 m)	x	-
Distance to the coast	Coastal rim	x	x
	Inland areas	x	x
Habitats	Residential/permanent	x	x
Typology	Residential/ short stays	x	x
	Residential features investment (pits, fireplaces, postholes, stone features)	xx	x

\* According to Neves and Diniz 2014; Neves 2018)

In what concerns the economic patterns, the absence of quantitative data can indeed masquerade an effective change in human behaviour from Early to Middle Neolithic. However, different aspects of the archaeological record – particularly those related to settlement patterns – during the Middle Neolithic show no trace of any economic intensification related to agropastoral strategies. On the contrary, some evidence may suggest that group mobility became increasing fundamental to Middle Neolithic groups (Valente and Carvalho, 2014, Carvalho and Valente, 2017). Beside Senhora da Alegria (Pereiro, 2013, Valera, 2013), open air habitats do not suggest any significant investment, nor long stays. There seems to be a trend of continuity between Early Neolithic and Middle Neolithic, in terms of settlement and economic patterns. The global picture shows a very irregular scenario, with habitats reflecting diverse economic strategies closely related to local environments. Frequently, the agriculture\ pastoralist\hunter-gatherer role assigned to each group relies more on



interpretative scenarios than in ecofacts. According to Lameiras (Lopéz-Doriga and Simões, 2015), the fully agropastoral character of the Early Neolithic economy is proven, but besides that, there are no other botanical remains prior to the Late Neolithic. Any possible crisis of the Middle Neolithic, as reported elsewhere (e.g. Shennan et al., 2013), cannot be considered due to the scarcity of currently available data. There could be a risk of wrongly interpreting archaeographic problems – already highlighted (Neves, 2018) as archaeological facts. Even so, and despite economic stability, the Middle Neolithic period was characterised by a ground-breaking set of changes described as Megalithism. Once again, and against theoretical expectations, it was performed at symbolic areas considered by traditional models not as a driven force but mainly as an output of progress.

### **THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – A NEW WAY OF BEING DEAD**

In economic terms, stability prevailed. At the funerary level, the archaeological record shows continuity rather than change. According to some authors (Carvalho, 2016, p. 121), the key features and burial practices of Megalithism already existed at the beginning of the 4th millennium BCE in natural limestone caves of Estremadura, such as Algar do Bom Santo. In Southern Portugal, burials in natural caves and megalithic architectures share common features such as the complex treatment of the corpses, hand-made arrangements of the funerary area and grave goods. Besides continuity in funerary behaviours, other traits traditionally related with the origins of Megalithism could be described as minor features considering the non-megalithic dimensions of the earliest megalithic monuments.

In Southern Portugal, funerary Megalithism, dated by human remains, emerged not only in the form of “small monuments” – as predicted by some linear evolutionist thought, but also as medium-size structures that could be quickly built by very few people (see a detailed synthesis in Boaventura, 2009, Rocha, 2005, Mataloto et al., 2017).

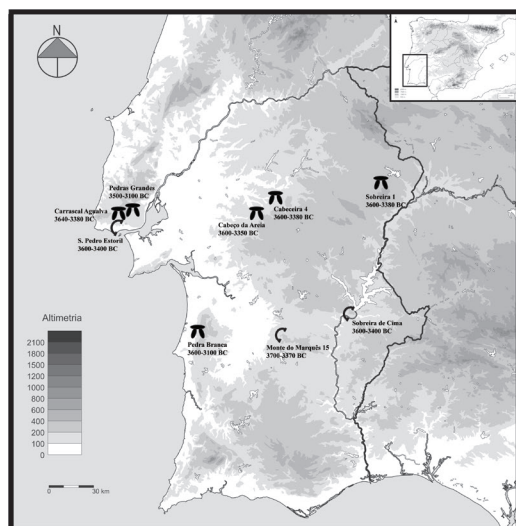
Those monuments, like the first hypogea, required a very small amount of labour, especially if we consider the number of working hours needed to build the large megalithic monuments of the apogee phase.

Despite such common traits, i.e. shared behaviours with burials in natural caves and minor efforts required to build/dig the earliest monuments, Megalithism should be considered a disruptive moment since megalithic funerary architectures evidence a new kind of relationship with Death

and the landscape.

Around 3,600-3,500 BCE, at least in inland Southern Portugal, some groups changed their traditional funerary practices in an impressive way. According to 14C chronology, Early Neolithic groups settled in the area in the late 6th millennium BCE, as shown at the settlement of Valada do Mato, in Évora (Diniz, 2007). No information is however available for funerary practices during the 5th and the first centuries of the 4th millennium BCE. The presence of Cardial sherds among other Early Neolithic pottery is not enough to classify the cave of Escoural (Montemor-o-Novo) as a necropolis during that period, though the on-going project at this cave can shed some light on the matter (Peyroteo-Sterjna et al., 2018). Given the archaeographic invisibility of the Early Neolithic dead in the area, regardless of the treatment given to the dead bodies, it suffered a serious, and very briefly viral change around 3600-3500 BCE.

Building/digging a funerary monument heralds a new kind of decisions and gestures, a new type of movements and relationships with the landscape and within the group. New choices had to be made and the selection of a precise area where to build/dig the monument meant a sharp contrast with the a priori location of natural caves. Selecting the people and tools to build/dig, identifying the availability of raw material, transporting the stone slabs and gathering earth and stone to create the tumulus were some of the actions (even though simple ones) that inaugurated these new symbolic landscapes (Fig.2).



*Fig.2 - Southern Portugal earliest Megalithic monuments – after 3600 BC (dolmens and hipogea)*

This group performance empowered the Dead – at least those few who were chosen to rest inside the monuments – but also the living in an unprecedented way. After a long period in which funerary practices left no trace, Death and the Dead (at least some of them) now performed in a privileged symbolic and social scenario. But the emergence of Megalithism in Southern Portugal, as a historical process, meant that, at a given moment, groups changed their funerary practices starting to behave like other communities settled along the Atlantic shores and the Mediterranean basin, replicating/adapting positive and negative architectures whose prototypes are well documented in those areas. These megalithic architectures enlarged the funerary landscape, which had so far been detected only in limestone areas – limited to the use of natural caves and pits, as in Castelo Belinho (Gomes, 2008). Different monument morphology (i.e. small dolmens, small/medium size dolmens with passage and hypogea), built in different geological formations, reflect the new ways of being Dead, and a significant change in Neolithic symbolic structures.

The available <sup>14</sup>C dates clearly indicate that Megalithism does not match, disproving the previous historiographic tradition (e.g. Jorge, 1990), the beginning of a new era called Middle Neolithic. On the contrary, megalithic monuments did not appear before the final phase of the Middle Neolithic period. As no archaeographic signs of economic change can be ascribed to this very significant innovation in the symbolic and social sphere, explanations for its emergence must be found elsewhere.

### **THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – SYMBOLS IN ACTION?**

The symbolic dimension of the origins of Megalithism – considered either at the global or regional level – has been underestimated in the last decades. Authors tended to focus on more-or-less detailed architectures and grave goods sequences to organize a very complex archaeological record.

Even so, the role of symbolic issues in triggering changes in social dynamics was highlighted for major phenomenon like Near Eastern or European Neolithisation (Cauvin, 1994; Hodder, 1990) at the end of the 20th century. However, his type of discourse was never developed for the origins of Megalithism.

Symbolic issues can act for Megalithism origins – as for Neolithisation – within primary but also in reception areas as Southern Portugal. In this region, Death and the Dead appear as significant beings in the landscape,

without evident signs of an economic maturation of the system, claiming the intervention of the Ancestors.

Considering the available data, the most powerful and economic explanation for the origins of Megalithism in Southern Portugal is imitation, or mimetic behaviour – a fundamental trait of cognition in humans and other species (e.g. Chavalarias, 2005). Such fundamental mimetic behaviours – e.g. adapting dolmens from the Atlantic façade, or hypogea from the Mediterranean basin, do not exclude Neolithic agency, as clearly evidenced by the diversity of Megalithic architectures.

Ignoring local geology, more suitable to digging than to building, the uncommon use of limestone slabs at the dolmens of Carrascal and Pedras Grandes (Boaventura, 2009, pp. 68 and 120) reflects a cultural choice emerging from group identity – albeit a pioneering attempt, with no continuity. These dolmens - Carrascal and Pedras Grandes – represent a rather different solution from the hypogeum of São Pedro do Estoril located only 15 km away.

In reception areas like Southern Portugal, this type of transfers could trigger a Symbolic Revolution with consequences that impacted on the entire social system, inducing competition, emulation and economic intensification by way of group festivities and rituals. In fact, Megalithic monuments preceded the technological take-off of Final Neolithic but the construction of larger monuments with more complex grave goods could also have represented an important stimulus to groups economic enlargement.

The fact that mimetic behaviours can explain the origins of Megalithism in reception areas does not mean that local groups could not produce original symbolic phenomena. Mimicking allows rebuilding mechanisms and changes to the archetype there are reflected in regional and chronological differences. If, in this case, we consider the chronology of Brittany and the Mediterranean, it seems that mimesis was the actual historical occurrence that triggered Megalithism as a consequence of endlessness travelled over Neolithic landscapes.

## **THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS**

In the last decades, long distance mobility was the subject of renewed interest. Theoretical debates around diffusionism and indigenism were overcome. Movement could again be researched since the late 1990s, with no risk of one being described as a historical-culturalist archaeologist. Archaeographic analysis, mainly within petrographic studies, identified raw-material displacements potentially reaching several hundred

kilometres by land and sea. Central Mediterranean obsidian (e.g. Lugliè, 2012), Alpine jade (e.g. Dominguez-Bella et al., 2015) and Iberian variscite (e.g. Odriozola et al., 2016) ranked among the durable materials that travelled long distances during the Neolithic period. Ancient DNA analysis – despite all problems raised by this type of data – recently confirmed, as expected, that human displacements were standard behaviour during Prehistory – not only among hunter-gatherers but also in agropastoral societies (Fregel, 2018).

Middle Neolithic networks have been described mainly at a regional level, for Southern Portugal. Tooth enamel analysis revealed medium-distance human movements (Carvalho, 2016) already documented since Early Neolithic period by flint and amphibole circulation between different geologic areas in Central/Southern Portugal. Some marine shells used as raw-material or adornments also travelled, but exotic items like amber and ivory are not documented during this phase – rendering their long-distance mobility and networks almost invisible. From an archaeographic point of view, Middle Neolithic groups seem to have used only local and regional products, although the mere presence of Megalithic monuments denies that proposition. During the Middle Neolithic, influences from the Atlantic and Mediterranean areas reached Western Iberia. The chronology and typology of hypogea such as Monte do Marquês, Sobreira de Cima and São Pedro do Estoril, and the chronology and typology of the (not so small) dolmens of Pedra Branca, Carrascal, Pedras Grandes, Cabeço da Areia, Cabeceira 4 and Sobreira 1 can hardly be interpreted as a cultural independent phenomenon, considering the pre-existing Atlantic and Mediterranean megalithic landscapes.

Also reflecting the intensity of displacements/networks in Southern Westernmost Iberia, no gradual chronological differences are found between coastal and inland (following the definition of Arias et al., 2009) areas. Human bones from the São Pedro do Estoril hypogeum (Cascais) are dated from the same period of Monte do Marquês 5 (Beja) and Sobreira de Cima 3 (Vidigueira) – approximately 150km apart. The same applies to the chronology of the dolmens of Pedras Grandes (Odivelas) and Carrascal da Agualva (Sintra), that are contemporary to Sobreira 1 (Elvas) – roughly 180 km away.

Concerning the rise of Megalithism, the construction and digging gestures both in littoral and interior areas appear simultaneously – to the extent that 14C dates can reflect Time.

## **THE ORIGINS OF MEGALITHISM – PRELUDE TO AN END**

In recent decades, Megalithism research has been mainly focused on the regional level, trying to establish architectural sequences and distribution areas of grave goods. The 14C chronology using AMS technique, combined with a critical reappraisal of samples selection, served as foundations for a new chronology, in which certain areas traditionally considered pioneers, such as Southern Portugal, lost their status and renfrew's Segmentary Societies Model stands as the last Grand Narrative concerning Megalithism origins. The role played by symbolic issues in the cultural status quo is generally underestimated, and explanations tend to assume that economic aspects, as a response to environmental change, demographic grow or social competition, acted as the driving force legitimised by ideology.

The Megalithic Origins in Southern Portugal seem to be well dated. The building of megalithic monuments began between 3600-3300 BCE, although those new gestures, that inaugurated a new symbolic landscape, do not seem to correspond to a turning point in the economy. In Southern Portugal, Megalithism appears to be the consequence of a mimetic behaviour: an adoption of funerary solutions created elsewhere. Why exactly did it appear at that precise moment? No evidence of maturation of the Neolithic economy were found so far, but the mechanisms ruling social mimesis can offer a solid explanation. Mimetic behaviour does not require Childe's missionaries, but inter-group communication networks are indeed mandatory.

According to radiocarbon dating, the rise of Megalithism in Southern Portugal was marked by the simultaneous construction of monuments inspired by both Atlantic dolmens and Mediterranean hypogea. Why were local communities ready to choose different funerary behaviours at that time? Part of the answer is certainly found in long-distance displacements and different architectural solutions, as some of the votive items clearly demonstrate the integration into a common religious system that travelled far and surpassed natural and cultural frontiers.

As occurred before, with the Neolithisation process, communities transported and adapted a common set of exogenous items to other cultural and geographic backgrounds. In Southern Portugal, according to 14C dates, synchronicity between coastal and inland areas revealed the vitality of local Neolithic networks.

In Southern Portugal, Middle Neolithic Megalithism involves a Symbolic revolution that could have been induced by mimetic behaviours vis-à-

-vis earlier Atlantic and Mediterranean funerary architectures. If so, distinct aspects of social systems appear to have travelled independently, thus making a historical process like Megalithism the result of endless movement across the landscape, from which transfers of ideologies arose.

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